

Views: Can gun-toting solve gay-bashing?

by Rev. Irene Monroe
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In a recent 5-4 ruling, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment protects an individual's right to own a gun for personal use. While the debate will continue to go on about whether the Second Amendment really means that American citizens only have the right to bear arms in connection with service in a well-regulated militia as referenced in the amendment or we have the right to keep a loaded handgun for self-defense, right now this is the law of the land.

For those American citizens who reside in congested crime-ridden urban areas riddled with drug and gang warfares, as I do, this recent ruling brings a heightened concern about personal safety. But this ruling also brings a heightened concern about

personal safety for those of us who rely on hate-crimes laws to protect us from the bigoted actions by our fellow citizens.

"I can see some crazed fool come into a bar where gays hang out or my homeys and shoot the hell out of us," Adam Williams told me. Williams is an African-American transman who has been the victim of both gay-bashing and racial violence. Feeling more vulnerable than ever in his life with this recent Supreme Court ruling Williams tell me he's going to carrying a gun with him.

"Ain't nothing out here to protect you now. I don't trust the cops 'cause they beat the shit out of you with other officers watching," said Williams, referring to the news about the cop beatdown of Duanna Johnson, an African-American transwoman, in a Memphis booking room that was captured on a surveillance video. "I'd be stupid not to go packing now."

Williams lives in Oakland, just outside of San Francisco, and he's going to check out the San Francisco chapter of Pink Pistols. As a national organization that encourages the LGBT community to arm itself to prevent hate crimes, the Pink Pistols are also a social gun club. On the San Francisco Pink Pistols Web site, it invites the community to learn how to shoot:

"We are a group of primarily gay shooters, who are welcoming to all. One need not be an experienced shooter, nor own a firearm. So if you are interested in learning to shoot in a non-threatening gay friendly environment (one member is a certified firearm instructor) then click on for the date of our next shoot."

Pink Pistols brandishes the mottos "Armed gays don't get bashed" and "Pick on someone your own caliber."

The group's message is a hot-button issue swirling in the LGBTQ community: Can gun-toting solve gay-bashing?

"They're trying to get urban gays and lesbians to not be afraid of the one instrument that, when used properly and legally, can save their lives," Jeff Soyer, a Pistols member of the Vermont chapter, told Alternate 101.

Libertarian activist Douglas Krick founded Pink Pistols in the anti-gun town of Boston. Although Pink Pistols have 48 chapters in 32 states and 2 countries, it not well received here in Boston, one of the most gay-friendly but top crime-ridden cities in the country.

“I don’t believe arming ourselves is a sustainable response to a subculture of hate towards homosexuality. We are not going to settle our scores as a community by having a shoot-out at the OK Corral,” stated Sue Hyde of the Boston office of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to the Southern Voices in 2002.

But Jonathan Rauch, the gay journalist whose headline article in the March 13, 2000, Salon Magazine Pink Pistols borrowed its name from, thinks differently. And he illustrated his point by reminding us of the 1998 killing of Mathew Shepard.

“Shepard was small, helpless and childlike. He never had a chance. This made him a sympathetic figure of a sort that is comfortingly familiar to straight Americans: the weak homosexual,” Rauch told Orange County Weekly in 2003

The Pink Pistols are considered the lunatic fringe of the LGBTQ community and are often compared to the Black Panthers and Jewish Defense League, all movements in response to hate crimes and discrimination against their groups. And their advocacy of guns is understandable.

Self-defense is a human right. And great spiritual leaders have spoken out on the subject. For example, the Dalai Lama said, “ If someone has a gun and is trying to kill you, it would be reasonable to shoot back with your own gun.” And Jesus stated in Luke 22:36, “Let him who hath no sword, let him sell his tunic and buy one.”

We feel most vulnerable when we have no means to defend ourselves from attacks both systematically and individually coming toward us. Organizations like the Pink Pistols offer a seemingly viable tool to stem gay violence.

However, guns will never be the great equalizer for an embattled group. They may, for a fleeting moment, deter our enemies but they will never permanently protect us from them. But guns do, however, signal to us that we might need to take another course of action.